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## An aspect of Alcuin: ‘*Tuus Albinus*’ – peevish egotist? or parrhesiast?

### INTRODUCTION

No student of Alcuin’s extensive letters can avoid engaging with the question of what we might call Alcuin’s ‘knowability’ as an individual. In over 270 letters from about a decade and a half, Alcuin of York (†804) informed, advised, consoled and admonished contemporaries, reacted to current events, and maintained a circle of friends and partners in reciprocal prayer that extended from Jerusalem to Ireland and from Rome to Salzburg. Alcuin left York in the 780s to become a friend and chief advisor to Charlemagne. He lived through a world of headlong change: civil order and political stability crumbled in Anglo-Saxon England while on the continent, Charlemagne went from strength to strength. Alcuin both changed his world and changed his views in response to the events he witnessed.<sup>1</sup>

My own longstanding interest in Alcuin and in the letters of other early medieval people leads in two contrasting directions. On the one hand, there are the general methodological issues raised when one wishes to use the extant evidence to explore the inner worlds of medieval people – whether that evidence is scant, abundant, enigmatic, or *apparently* transparent. On the other, there is a whole set of very particular biographical and psychological questions about Alcuin himself. The ways that I – or indeed any scholar – will approach the two challenges, general and particular, are always interrelated. So answers to the particular questions about any historical person will always imply a set of methods, assumptions and values even when these are not made explicit. Here, accordingly, I shall begin with some very general reflections on the topic of this volume before looking at a single aspect of Alcuin, one which might easily appear to be an indication of ‘ego trouble’, namely, Alcuin’s predilection for offering unsolicited advice and admonition<sup>2</sup> to all and sundry, but especially to those of higher status. In his own words to Charlemagne: “Perhaps someone may say: ‘Why is that man occupying himself with affairs not his own. He does not realize that nothing concerning your well-being ought to be foreign to me.’” *Forte quislibet dicit: “Quid ille homo alienis se ingerit rebus?” Non agnoscit nihil mihi alienum vestrae prosperitatis esse debere.*<sup>3</sup> Or in ‘ego-trouble’ terms: who on earth did Alcuin think he was?

### METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS: US AND THEM

As inhabitants of an intellectual world closer to Freud than Cicero or Fortunatianus, readers of this article participate in a culture where shared, usually unspoken, assumptions about human personality and motiva-

<sup>1</sup> I thank the editors for the invitation to contribute to this volume, and for their patience. I would especially like to thank Irene van Renswoude for expert discussion, and Frans van Liere for discussion of the translations. Questions about Alcuin’s individuality and knowability were what first inspired me to choose Alcuin as a research topic and I am still grateful to Michael Lapidge for his encouragement; since then, I have engaged with these questions either directly or through *obiter dicta* in almost all of my publications about Alcuin. Hence the preponderance of footnote references to those earlier discussions where fuller documentation may be found. For others’ work on Alcuin, begin with Donald A. Bullough, *Alcuin: Achievement and Reputation*, being part of the Ford Lectures delivered in Oxford in Hilary Term 1980, *Education and Society in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* 16 (Leiden/Köln/Boston 2004). Canvassing the extensive and important theoretical literature on questions about medieval individuality and the self was outside the scope of this article. Throughout this article, Alcuin’s letters will be cited from Ernst Dümmler’s edition: *Alcuin, Epistolae* (ed. Ernst Dümmler, MGH EE 4, Aevi Karolini 2, Berlin 1895).

<sup>2</sup> The connotations of Latin *ammoneo* are milder than the English word ‘admonish’; I thank Donald Bullough for calling my attention to this (personal communication). I discuss admonition in: Mary Garrison, *Quid Hiniildus cum Christo*, in: *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge* 1, ed. Katherine O’Brien O’Keefe/Andy Orchard (Toronto/Buffalo/London 2005) 237–259; ead., *Les correspondants d’Alcuin*, in: *Alcuin de York à Tours: écriture, pouvoir, et réseaux dans l’Europe du haut moyen âge*, ed. Philippe Depreux/Bruno Judic (*Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l’Ouest* 111, 3, Rennes/Tours 2004) 319–331.

<sup>3</sup> Alcuin, *Epistola* 211, ed. Dümmler 351f; cf. Terence, *Heauton Timorumenos* I. i. 77.

tion are easier to articulate in a familiar every-day language than observations about language and discourse themselves. For centuries, the reverse situation obtained. Those educated in Latin could command a rich and precise vocabulary about verbal expression even while, from a twenty-first century perspective, their lexical and conceptual resources for articulating the inner world were limited. To the extent that the inner world was a subject of reflective scrutiny, that scrutiny was guided by urgent concerns about the self in relation to God and salvation, to a lesser degree, shaped by norms and expectations of group affiliation.<sup>4</sup> And although the old adage that the first millennium was an ‘age without portraits’ is no longer tenable,<sup>5</sup> the early medieval world was indisputably an age in which privacy and good mirrors – touchstones for much contemporary thought about the development of a sense of self – were not part of daily life for most people. At the same time, the selflessness enjoined in the Gospels would have been so deeply familiar to those we study that our investigation might seem to be going against the grain from its outset.<sup>6</sup>

‘Ego trouble’, or the quest for the individual, or for the self – however one might define both search and object – impinge on the scholarly field now known in English as life-writing. Even without careful enquiry, it is obvious that the forms of life writing undertaken by scholars and by those who are the objects of the scholarly study, have themselves evolved.<sup>7</sup> The evolution of these two categories, in turn, mirrors larger and more elusive trends. The history of autobiography, biography, and to a lesser extent, letter-writing, have received their share of scholarly attention. At the same time, the scholarly and popular curiosity that motivates studies of past lives has itself evolved as well, and is no less distinctive, culturally shaped, and shaping. And so before embarking on the quest for early medieval individuals or asking in what ways these persons constructed and expressed their identities, it may be useful to look carefully at the nature of our own scholarly curiosity here. Some combination of the wish for certain knowledge, or for psychological explanation in terms familiar to us (though foreign to our subjects) and an appetite for what I shall suggest is a kind of search for the intimacy of friendship (or the indiscreet disclosures of celebrity gossip), then, might underlie the current enterprise.

The modern taste in biography and current notions of what constitutes a good biography seem to owe as much to contemporary experience of friendship and relations with authority as to depth psychology. Self-disclosure has become a touchstone for western definitions of friendship in a way that was never so exclusively true in the past.<sup>8</sup> And thus the biography that stops short of such revelations or acknowledges ignorance and uncertainty is vulnerable to sharp criticism.<sup>9</sup> When, at various times in the past, friendship was regarded as based on other criteria such as utility, common interests, virtue, *caritas*, or the shared goal of Christian salvation, the contemporary forms of biography corresponded in some measure to those ideals: saints’ *vitae* or catalogues *de viris illustribus*.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, concepts of human character, patterns of relationship with authority, and

<sup>4</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Did the twelfth century discover the individual?*, in: ead., *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley 1982) 82–109; on cultural and historical variation in interiority and the *Emergenzthese*, see Ineke van ‘t Spijker, *Fictions of the Inner Life: Religious Literature and the Formation of the Self in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Disputatio 4, Turnhout 2004) 4f.; also relevant are: Willemien Otten, *The Bible and the self in medieval autobiography: Otloh of St. Emmeram (1010–1070) and Peter Abelard (1079–1142)*, in: *The Whole and Divided Self*, ed. David E. Aune/John McCarthy (New York 1997) 130–157, and Barbara Rosenwein’s exemplary study: *Barbara Rosenwein, Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Cornell 2006); for the inner worlds of medieval Icelanders, see William Ian Miller, *Deep inner lives: Individualism and people of honour*, in: *History of Political Thought* 16 (1995) 190–207.

<sup>5</sup> Gerd Tellenbach quoted in Rudolf Schieffer, *Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der biographischen Darstellung frühmittelalterlicher Persönlichkeiten*, in: *Historische Zeitschrift* 229 (1979) 85–95, at 85.

<sup>6</sup> Mt 10, 39; Mt 16, 25; Mark 8, 35; Luke 9, 24, Luke 14, 26; Luke 17, 33.

<sup>7</sup> For a conspectus of literature on biography and autobiography, see Marjorie O’Rourke Boyle, *Loyola’s Acts: The Rhetoric of the Self* (Berkeley/London 1997) 185–187.

<sup>8</sup> David Konstan, *Friendship, frankness and flattery*, in: *Friendship, Flattery, & Frankness of Speech: Studies on Friendship in the New Testament World*, ed. John T. Fitzgerald (Supplements to *Novum Testamentum*, Leiden/New York/Köln 1996) 7–20, 14–19, on changing ideals of virtue and friendship.

<sup>9</sup> See Janet Malcolm, *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes* (1993; repr. London 1995 with new afterword) 9.

<sup>10</sup> For changing practices, functions and ideals in biography, see inter al. *Latin Biography*, ed. Thomas A. Dorey (Studies in Latin Literature and Its Influence, London 1967); Michael Lapidge, *The saintly life in Anglo-Saxon England*, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. Malcolm Godden/Michael Lapidge (Cambridge 1991) 243–263; Rudolf Blum, *Die Literaturverzeichnung im Altertum und Mittelalter: Versuch einer Geschichte der Biobibliographie von den Anfängen bis zum Beginn der Neuzeit* (Frankfurt am Main 1983); Walter Berschin, *Biographie und Epochenstil im lateinischen Mittelalter 1–5* (Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters, Stuttgart 1986–2004).

attitudes towards heroes and celebrity play a role – compare 'great men' biographies of Antiquity or the nineteenth century with the modern celebrity journalism, the latter purveying details and even images which most people would not wish to be shared beyond their own immediate circle.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, in biographies written for a pre-teen readership, a kind of moral archaism seems to prevail: there the more traditional goals of edifying or inspiring emulation persist.

### BIOGRAPHY AND THE SELF

Thus the project of the scholarly investigation of a person's life, self, or individuality, far from being an enterprise with timeless constants, has shown chameleon-like diversity. It is obvious that this should be true once we move beyond basic data. But it is sobering to realize that even the relevance and reliability of the data we think of as fundamental points to chasms of incommensurability. We think of dates of birth and death as essential data. For early medieval subjects, the first is rarely available: registers of births were not kept, birthdays were not celebrated; it was rather, the *dies natalis*, or day of birth into eternal life, that was record-worthy. We have access to the subjectivity and self-construction of the individuals of the past only through the lenses of our own subjectivity and our own experience of self. I use the lens metaphor intentionally (and by it I intend the eye's own lens, rather than spectacles) although eye-ball would work even better: there can be no vision without eye or lens, but the eye and lens themselves affect how objects appear. The visual input and cognitive processing useful for a frog to catch flies would not serve the fly itself and would be inadequate for feline hunting. Our perceptions of persons in the past are thus intensely subjective, perhaps to a degree that we may be unable to acknowledge. The scholarly engagement with the 'ego trouble' and identity-questions of past individuals is thus an intensely subjective encounter: we shape or construct a character from the evidence and we ourselves may react to the evidence and the construction. Some aspects of this project are easy enough when one studies the long dead, for, from a legal point of view, "you cannot slander the dead".<sup>12</sup> Still, the ease with which scholars can make character or psychological judgements about long-dead individuals should invite both self-reflection and methodological explicitness.<sup>13</sup>

### US AND THEM: PRAYERS AND GRIEF

An example which illustrates the disparity between the modern taste in life-writing and the interests and resources of those whom we study is the example of Alcuin's use, in his florilegium, of Augustine's *Confessiones*. Alcuin, the knowable individual carefully excerpting from the towering genius of introspection: what more tantalizing example of 'Rezeptionsgeschichte' could there be? Will Alcuin choose extracts about the theft of pears, sexuality, the death of a friend, conversion, or even the farewell to a mother? In fact, Alcuin pieced together scattered quotations from the *Confessiones* in order to make a prayer – an appropriation entirely consonant with his explicit intentions for his compilation, a devotional miscellany entitled *De laude dei*.<sup>14</sup> I am sure that I am not alone in having felt a pang of disappointment at Alcuin's selection and I suspect others may share it. It illustrates something about the distance between my priorities and Alcuin's.<sup>15</sup> No simple name for this phenomenon already exists; I suggest that it is a form of projection, importing one's contemporary human or scholarly priorities backwards, perhaps assuming too much similarity between oneself and the person one studies. (In this instance, the unspoken assumption is that Alcuin 'ought' to have chosen biographically revealing extracts.) But whereas

<sup>11</sup> Malcolm, *Silent Woman* 8–10.

<sup>12</sup> Malcolm, *Silent Woman* 8: "The dead cannot be libelled or slandered. They are without legal recourse."

<sup>13</sup> If there is any basis for ethical duty towards the dead, it might be derived from the thought of Emmanuel Levinas; see his *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, translated from the French by Michael B. Smith/Barbara Harshav (London/New York 1998), for example 161f.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Garrison, *The study of emotions in early medieval history: some starting points*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 10, 2 (2001) 243–250, at 244; I have consulted one of the two manuscripts, Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek B.II. 10, on microfiche. On the reception of the *Confessiones* more generally, see Pierre Courcelle, *Les Confessions de Saint Augustin dans la tradition littéraire* (Paris 1963).

<sup>15</sup> Courcelle, *Les Confessions*, shows that the *Confessiones* were not read for autobiographical interests in the early Middle Ages; the title itself, for Augustine, meant both praising God and accusing himself; see Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London 1967) 270.

projection as a psychological defence entails unconsciously attributing one's own unacceptable thoughts and feelings to another person, this scholarly historian's version of projection involves unquestioned every-day notions; for the sake of terminological clarity we might characterize it simply as one form of retrospective distortion. Either way, it points to the subjective involvement on the part of the investigator.

It may be useful to cite another example of retrospective distortion, again one which converges with a defence mechanism. Modern readers have often tended to dismiss or doubt the sincerity of the emotional expressions, particularly of grief, that they encounter in source material. Indeed, I have often been astonished by how frequently students and scholars alike react to medieval writing about painful loss with the question: was the feeling genuine? In this instance, rather than assuming that medieval people are too much like us, the suppressed assumption is that they may be radically different, perhaps even insincere. Above all, when the texts in question refer to the loss of a close and beloved partner, teacher or friend, the modern reader's doubt demands scrutiny, for such scepticism is not something that we would be likely to express to a present-day friend, nor even to a distant acquaintance. To take a few examples: Carolingian Latin has been slated by as perceptive a scholar as Auerbach, who regarded it as "incapable of expressing the life of the times", so that characters encountered through it were "blurred and lifeless";<sup>16</sup> "... in these centuries the personality is hidden from us by the veil of scholastic Latin ... we discern ... a sclerosis in the representation of the human person."<sup>17</sup> To illustrate his judgement, Auerbach chose the examples that he thought 'relatively original' and 'unusually alive' for the period. He implied that even the letters exchanged between Lupus and Einhard after the death of Einhard's wife left him unmoved and focussed on how Lupus's writing fell short of classical literary norms.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Alcuin has been characterized as having no problem with grief<sup>19</sup> even though – to cite only one example – in his poem about the Bishops, Kings and Saints of York, "to the Roman foundation and occupation of York are devoted nineteen lines of Alcuin's poem: the death of Ælberht alone receives thirty-four" (Ælberht, archbishop of York, was Alcuin's teacher, colleague and perhaps surrogate father).<sup>20</sup> Why, in these or other cases, has it been so easy to question or dismiss expressions of grief? The apparent opacity of the literary commonplaces of grief and consolation is one possible explanation; yet in similar situations today we too may resort to commonplaces and pre-printed cards. The sceptical reaction once again brings us face-to-face with the subjectivity that accompanies the scholarly pursuit of the inner lives of past persons. With grief, scholarly doubt is surely a form of denial. (Denial or disbelief is, of course, seen as a primary, if temporary, defence against grief in most modern schemes and is sometimes even regarded as one of the stages of mourning.) And this particular historiographical denial is a defence mechanism which can collude with the textual opacity invoked by Auerbach: the language may in fact not touch us. For participants in a post-Romantic culture, it requires faith and human empathy to recognize that rhetorical *topoi* can serve as vehicles for real feeling.<sup>21</sup>

#### IDENTITY, RHETORIC AND THE CAGE OF RHETORIC, LATINITY

To turn now from these questions about empathy and emotion back to the subject of this volume. The invitation to contribute to this volume lays down the challenge of coming up with a counterpart to the groundbreaking work on group identities of the Vienna School which can apply to individual early medieval writ-

<sup>16</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (1958), trans. Ralph Manheim (Bollingen Series 74, 1965; repr. with new forward by Jan Ziolkowski, Princeton 1993) 122–125.

<sup>17</sup> Auerbach, *Literary Language* 122–123.

<sup>18</sup> Auerbach, *Literary Language* 123.

<sup>19</sup> Peter von Moos, *Consolatio: Studien zur Mittellateinischen Trostliteratur über den Tod und zum Problem der christlichen Trauer* (4 vols., München 1971–1972) 3, 109: "Aufs ganze gesehen erscheint in der Alkuinschen Trostkunst die Trauer kaum je als ein Problem."

<sup>20</sup> Peter Godman, *The Bishops, Kings and Saints of York* (Oxford Medieval Texts, Oxford 1982) lvii. Alcuin's evident grief here has even been used as a dating criterion for the poem: Louis Holtz, *Alcuin et la renaissance des arts libéraux*, in: *Charlemagne and His Heritage: 1200 Years of Civilization and Science in Europe*, ed. Paul Butzer/Maximilian Kerner/Walter Oberschelp (Turnhout 1997) 45–60, 51 note 17.

<sup>21</sup> On literary originality and *topoi*, see Peter Dronke, *Poetic Individuality in the Middle Ages: New Departures in Poetry* (Oxford 1970) especially 1–32; Garrison, *The study of emotions* 245–247, and ead., *Alcuin, Carmen IX and Hrabanus, ad Bonosum: A teacher and his pupil write consolation*, in: *Poetry and Philosophy in the Middle Ages: A Festschrift for Peter Dronke*, ed. John Marenbon (Leiden/Boston/Köln 2001) 63–78.



ers. Study in Vienna and elsewhere of compositions (oral and written) that groups use to represent themselves and their pasts – such as histories, genealogies and king lists – has uncovered shared patterns, and even cross-cultural regularities in the way the past is reshaped, forgotten and transformed, so that, for example, a royal genealogy will project contemporary patterns of political affiliation into a statement of biological affiliation in the past. But when we move from compositions (whether written or orally transmitted) about the collective past to the writings in any genre that can be mined for insight into individuals, we enter a different world of textual, or better, writerly, sophistication and psychological complexity, one where the interplay between the subjectivity of the scholar and the historical subject threatens a dazzling play of mirrors. In this volume we have been invited to address these questions: “Did individuals after Augustine have the capacity for self-reflection, and conscious ways of dealing with themselves in relation to their environment?”<sup>22</sup> Here I will be using the example of Alcuin’s admonitions as a case study for promoting a rhetorical approach to the study of early medieval individuals.<sup>23</sup> Although concepts of collective discourse and identity have figured in the work of the Vienna school, rhetoric itself, in the strict original sense of Latin rhetoric, has not hitherto figured in the ethnogeneticists’ tool kit. Since the primary evidence for individuals’ ideas about themselves and their negotiation of their social world is found in their Latin writings, their own models and guidelines for composition and interpretation are primary interpretative tools. Supplementary evidence from both social networks and from the dissemination, reception, and text history of a person’s writings can nuance and extend conclusions derived from the texts themselves.

It is widely acknowledged that the depth of written religious introspection and self-searching of Augustine’s *Confessiones* is absent for centuries afterwards.<sup>24</sup> And it is intriguing to note that there is also an early medieval lapse in one particular aspect of authorial self-awareness if one uses authors’ vision of their work’s availability to posterity as a yardstick: after Cassiodorus (†585) private individual letter-writers did not issue planned collections of the letters furnished with prefaces (the demise in fact predates him); poets after Fortunatus did not issue verse-collections divided into books.<sup>25</sup> But if the notion of creating a literary persona for posterity seems to have more or less fallen into abeyance, that does not necessarily mean early medieval writers were incapable of sophisticated self representation. And one area where finely deployed control of expression in relation to shared external norms can be located among literate individuals is in the realm of Latin grammar and rhetoric. Mastery of these disciplines (and, especially the ability to deploy the *topoi* that have seemed to some to be disproofs of genuine feeling) could be an important (even if not always essential) ingredient in their effectiveness as bishops, preachers, teachers, ambassadors, and so on. It is salutary to remember that Augustine

<sup>22</sup> See the introduction to this volume by Walter Pohl.

<sup>23</sup> Many of the arguments here are expounded and more fully documented in Garrison, *Les correspondants d’Alcuin 319–331*. There I first explored the systematic connections between Alcuin’s unique network of correspondents, his status, his predilection of admonition and collective address with several motives, namely the role of *caritas* in his thought, the concept of *parrhesia* and post-796 apocalypticism. Further on one particular admonition, Garrison, *Quid Hiniildus cum Christo 237–259*.

<sup>24</sup> For one angle on Augustine and interiority, see the controversial study by Philip Cary, *Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (Oxford 2000).

<sup>25</sup> These patterns discussed in relation to Alcuin and his predecessors in Garrison, *Alcuin’s world through His Letters and Verse* (unpubl. PhD Cambridge 1996) 19–23; there is of course considerable secondary literature on individual letter collections. For an older conspectus, see Hermann Peter, *Der Brief in der Römischen Literatur: Literargeschichtliche Untersuchungen und Zusammenfassungen* (Abhandlungen der philologisch-historischen Classe der Königl. Sächsischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften 3, 1901; anastatic reprint Hildesheim 1965); on anonymity more generally, Paul Gerhard Schmidt, *Perché tanti anonimi nel medioevo? Il problema della personalità dell’autore nella filologia mediolatina*, in: *Filologia mediolatina 6–7* (1999–2000) 1–8. James J. John, *The named (and namable) scribes in “Codices Latini Antiquiores”*, in: *Scribi e colofoni: le sottoscrizioni di copisti dalle origini all’avvento della stampa. Atti del X seminario di Erice, X colloquio del Comité international de paléographie latine* [Erice,] 23–28 ottobre 1993, ed. Emma Condello/Giuseppe De Gregorio (Centro italiano di studi sull’alto Medioevo. Biblioteca del Centro per il collegamento degli studi medievali e umanistici 14, Spoleto 1995) 107–121. In the same collection, though concerned with a later era, see Albert Derolez, *Pourquoi les copistes signaient-ils leurs manuscrits?* 37–56. For a very useful survey about precepts and practice of authorial self-naming, see Ernst R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (1948), trans. Willard R. Task (London 1953), excursus XVII, *Mention of the Author’s Name in Medieval Literature* 515–518. Authorial collections of work, colophones, and dedications are evidence for both authorial (and individual) self-awareness and for the author’s conception of the audience and literary posterity. The resurgence of authorial compilations of letters and poems in the central Middle Ages is clearly a watershed, but needs to be evaluated in terms of audience and patronage as well as in relation to the construction of the authorial persona and the author’s self-awareness. Thus the waning of evidence for authorial compilation of verse and letters should not be construed as a total eclipse of self-awareness.

was not merely a master of introspection, but also a professor of rhetoric.<sup>26</sup> And so it is through the resources of medieval latin rhetoric that we might be able to best appreciate the sophistication of the individuals of the early Middle Ages – that is, if either individuals or sophistication exist. Now with scholarship on writers of other eras, rhetorical criticism has sometimes seemed to carry the danger of distancing the reader from the author's self (because the self can seem to vanish into rhetoric), but for the supposedly unreflective and unsophisticated persons of what were formerly known as the 'dark ages', this very distancing constitutes a kind of defamiliarization that in the end permits better acquaintance. Alcuin's discourse of admonition will be the test case, but first a few more preliminaries about the 'cage of rhetoric' itself.<sup>27</sup>

The excursion into the 'cage of rhetoric' in search of the elusive early medieval individuals brings the danger that we will liberate only those historical subjects whose distinctive language makes them the easiest to hear: those who shout the loudest. There is a further corollary to the methodology implied here: if interpreting texts is the primary way to explore a medieval person's experience of his or her identity, then the project is always dialogical; it starts with the subjectivity of the scholar and the text and moves on to the attempt to recover what I call 'the shared understanding of the sender and receiver', or writer and audience. When the scholar's subjectivity is pushed into the background and the author's intention is assumed to be transparent, the project seems simple enough. The apparent simplicity is deceptive. Take Alcuin's discourse of admonition at face value and he appears to be a meddling know-it-all egotist; and with his effusive statements of flattery and friendship, sycophantic and insincere to boot.

#### THE CAGE OF RHETORIC AND THE SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF SENDER AND RECEIVER

The notion that authentic feeling and literary self-revelation are best served by unique or untutored language is an artefact of a post-Romantic sensibility. A corollary, and no less misleading, assumption, is that rhetorical commonplaces, or *topoi*, *must* be either insincere or false, and that, accordingly, the most 'original' or unparalleled language or expressions will be the most revealing. On the contrary: shared commonplaces are entirely capable of transmitting the shared understanding of sender and receiver. We still rely on shared commonplaces constantly today in certain media and situations. In medieval texts, even the elements that can seem most counter-factual (the saint was pious and saintly from birth, for example), communicate a shared understanding – although the significance of that understanding may not be the positivist 'truth' that the historian seeks. So for a modern reader to be able to reconstruct the shared understanding of sender and receiver (or of author and intended audience) requires some prior grasp of the rules of composition and the literary universe. An analogy can clarify the point: most people would readily acknowledge that a musical composition which follows familiar conventions of form and harmony might communicate a depth, complexity and intensity of emotion that rivals or surpasses a primal scream – and that the expressive potential of score and performance are not hindered by the conventions or rules. Or again, a famous and well-known play, well-performed, may have no less dramatic intensity than modern improvisation. In both cases, an established score or script is a vehicle for finely nuanced, rule-governed, cultural communication. And for both music and drama, when we ask whether the performance conveyed emotion, we also acknowledge that the question is one of subjective experience. The question is partly: was I moved by the performance? In both cases, too, the performance may speak most to the connoisseur of that art-form, the listener able to appreciate subtle choices about tone, emphasis, pace.

Thus attentiveness to language and rhetoric is one method of identifying personal emotions and thence literary, and perhaps also psychological, individuality.<sup>28</sup> But these very things we seek in the quest to reveal (or become acquainted with) self-aware individuals are themselves subjectively apprehended. And so the threat of the post-modern barrier looms: if all is rhetoric, where is the self, the agent that deploys the rhetoric? To find that, we may have to go outside both rhetoric and text to triangulate from external evidence. Two examples can illustrate the method I propose.

The first example: what of the uncultivated literary style that can seem to reveal a self? Does uncultivated language necessarily imply a naive individual? Gregory of Tours' Latinity was frequently criticized by an

<sup>26</sup> Philip Burton, *Language in the Confessions of Augustine* (Oxford 2007).

<sup>27</sup> I owe the term to Medieval Letters-special subject student Michael Brothwell.

<sup>28</sup> I here elide the two for the sake of simplicity.

earlier generation of commentators as naive and slipshod. More recent studies show him to be a sophisticated and accomplished narrator who wrote in a Latin style typical of his times, while external evidence indicates that he must have been a sophisticated and adept social actor: “Did [one of the critics] ever ask himself how Gregory managed to hold his job as one of the most prominent bishops in Gaul with a perception as incoherent as the literary historian seems to think?”, as Giselle de Nie has asked.<sup>29</sup> Juxtaposing one equation – (apparently) naive style equals naive character – with both external data and an alternative literary evaluation – can offer a more convincing understanding of Gregory even while it distances us from him. Hence the importance of supplementing stylistic and linguistic judgments with historical data. Latinity and rhetoric are not simple mirrors of the man.

A second example: Alcuin appeared to be on terms of warmest friendship with a vast network. Alcuin’s letters offer a challenge which is the reverse of the case with Gregory – how can a very accomplished but repetitive style (which easily be censured as cliché-ridden) yield insight into Alcuin’s social and emotional world? Alcuin himself apologized for recycling his own words: “I do not blush to repeat myself”.<sup>30</sup> As with Gregory, one begins by evaluating these traits in context. Here, reception context corroborates the acceptability of repetition. Alcuin’s contemporaries and followers imitated his characteristic expressions and turns of phrase because they regarded him as a master of both epistolary and poetic style.<sup>31</sup> In part because of his repetitive and formulaic style, detecting degrees of deference and hierarchy in Alcuin’s social world is possible through systematic investigation.<sup>32</sup> The clearly established conventions of salutation formulas can be a starting point.<sup>33</sup> I would contend that degrees of intimacy can also be identified by using external evidence as a clue to precisely what degree of elaboration of topical expressions was associated with Alcuin’s closest friendships; this picture can be corroborated and extended by other indicators such as the use of jest and word-play.<sup>34</sup>

#### EGO TROUBLE ?

Alcuin has the rare distinction of being the only early medieval person in this volume to have been described as having egotism among his character traits.<sup>35</sup> In a brilliant two-page description, the great Vienna his-

<sup>29</sup> Giselle de Nie, *Views from a many-Windowed Tower: Studies of Imagination in the Works of Gregory of Tours* (Amsterdam 1987) 11.

<sup>30</sup> Alcuin, *Epistola 161*, ed. Dümmler 260, l. 10–11: *ideo non erubescio prius dicta rescribere et iterare quae ante direxi. Etsi inmemor sim, quid prius scriberim, non tamen inmemor sum caritatis aeternae.*

<sup>31</sup> Of the considerable relevant literature I signal the article of Hans Haefele, *Decerpsi pollice flores: Aus Hrabans vermischten Gedichten*, in: *Tradition und Wertung: Festschrift für Franz Brunhölzl zum 65. Geburtstag* ed. Gunther Bernt/Fidel Rädle/Gabriel Silagi (Sigmaringen 1989) 59–74, which demonstrates that Hrabanus incorporated phrases from Alcuin’s poetry most often when writing to other fellow-students of Alcuin.

<sup>32</sup> Mary Garrison, *Liaisons dangereuses: Hiërarchie, respect en amicitia aan het Karolingische hof*, in: *Middeleeuwse Magister: Feestbundel aangeboden aan Árpád P. Orbán bij zijn emeritaat*, ed. Mariken Teeuwen/Els Rose (Hilversum 2008) 13–30.

<sup>33</sup> Carol Lanham, *Salutation Formulas in Latin Letters to 1200: Syntax, Style, and Theory* (Münchener Beiträge zur Mediävistik und Renaissance-Forschung, München 1975).

<sup>34</sup> Garrison, *The study of emotions*; ead., *Praesagum nomen tibi: The significance of name-wordplay in Alcuin’s Letters to Arn*, in: *Erzbischof Arn von Salzburg*, ed. Meta Niederkorn-Bruck/Anton Scharer (VIÖG 40, Wien/München 2004) 107–127; ead., *Alcuin’s World through his Letters and Verse* 45–52.

<sup>35</sup> Heinrich Fichtenau, *The Carolingian Empire*, trans. Peter Munz (Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching 1, Toronto 1978) 95f.: “To understand the mind of the scholars of Charlemagne’s palace, it is best to begin with the description of one definite personality, and the choice is easy. It is Alcuin and Alcuin only whom we can meet face to face, so to speak, in his letters. He was, furthermore, the model for a whole generation of pupils who imitated him in their attitudes. ... Alcuin was, after all, in every respect a collector. He amassed huge quantities of information on all manner of subjects. He collected riches; he collected friends; and, especially during the last years of his life, he collected intercessors in all countries to pray for the salvation of his soul.” Ibid. 96: “His method is best illustrated by his ability to produce apt information and quotations. There was no situation and no person for which there was not a heading in his enormous ‘card index’. There was consolation for the sick, moral exhortations for kings and magnates, unctuous edification for a patriarch. ‘Advise everybody to obey the will of God; advise the king gently, the bishops with dignity, and the princes with confidence.’ As this quotation shows, he clearly had a formula for every rank. It was used repeatedly in his letters.” “At the same time, we must not underestimate Alcuin’s achievements. ... It is very unlikely that anybody ever asked for his, Alcuin’s, own opinion ... His great memory offered answers with the precision of a dictionary. ... Alcuin was quite aware that he was in this respect a unique phenomenon among his contemporaries. ... Together with such egotism... we find in the ageing scholar... an unmistakable tendency towards sentimentality.”

torian Heinrich Fichtenau touched on Alcuin's knowability, his enthusiasm for collecting – information, relics, friends and intercessors – his aptitude with quotations and admonitions, his 'unheroic' or bourgeois attitude, his awareness of his unique role and status, and his egotism, among other topics. The paragraphs are masterly for their vividness, incisiveness and aptly chosen detail – the most compelling brief description of Alcuin to be found in any general book on Carolingian history. Fichtenau seems to have deduced Alcuin's egotism from his willingness to offer (apparently) unsolicited opinions and his ability even to address august figures entirely unknown to him in terms of Christian affection and familiarity.<sup>36</sup>

Fichtenau's sketch is based on great learning and insight. As a modern reading of the evidence, it is incontrovertible. At the same time, it invites us to wonder whether contemporaries would have reacted the same way and also to ask whether the character traits that Fichtenau inferred from Alcuin's discourses of familiarity and admonition would actually reflect the same underlying psychology then as now. Certainly there is external evidence, both from contemporaries' reaction to Alcuin and from the later copying and reception of his writings, that can qualify Fichtenau's picture. At this point the acute reader might detect a bit of special pleading. Biographical research brings the possibility that the researcher will come to identify with, and wish to defend (or react against, and wish to accuse) the subject of enquiry.<sup>37</sup> Hence (the reader might wonder) my attempt to reinterpret the data construed as evidence of Alcuin's egotism in order to create a more attractive portrait?

Before trying to attribute psychological meaning to Alcuin's discourses of familiarity and admonition, it may be useful to contextualize both more fully. Alcuin's status was unique (as Fichtenau recognized) and derived in large part from the impact of his character rather than from his official rank, which was that of a deacon, a *magister*,<sup>38</sup> and later (after 796) an abbot. Alcuin's character – who he thought he was and others' regard for him – can be illuminated by citing some of the most distinctive features of his epistolary network and his nicknaming practices.<sup>39</sup>

Alcuin's extant letters include more series of letters to single individuals than the collections of contemporaries such as Lupus and Einhard, where most individual recipients are represented by only one or two, or three letters at the most.<sup>40</sup> His collection also includes more letters to collectivities than any other comparable letter collection.<sup>41</sup> The self-regard, social esteem and sense of urgency which enabled him to write to all the people of Kent, say, or all the inmates of a particular monastery, with the confidence that the letter would be presented appropriately to the group is far more remarkable in a *magister* or a deacon than an archbishop or pope. (For the latter, their roles entailed an official status and authority in relation to such collectivities.) Remarkably, Alcuin's letters include 24 such letters in all. In the Boniface collection, there are only 4 such, among Einhard's letters, only 1 (to his monks at Seligenstadt). Even among the letters of Pope Gregory III preserved amidst Boniface's, there are only 8 letters to groups (such as to all the Old Saxons or to all the ecclesiastics of Germania).<sup>42</sup> This distribution raises the question: who did Alcuin think he was? Evidence for ego trouble? Alcuin had been received as a bishop at the council of Frankfort in 794 and he had a social and epistolary network that spanned Europe.<sup>43</sup> Alcuin has been judged negatively for failing to obtain a bishopric, but his lack of episcopal status meant that the potential audience for his admonitions had no bounds – indeed, it was precisely

<sup>36</sup> Fichtenau, *Carolingian Empire* 96.

<sup>37</sup> Malcolm, *Silent Woman* 77, 84. In a University of York undergraduate history dissertation, William Gibaud confronted this issue of subjectivity directly by sending researchers a survey about their reactions to the asylum-letters they were researching: William Gibaud, *The Lunatics Cry: Resistance through Writing in the Asylum 1850–1906* (2008).

<sup>38</sup> Donald Bullough, Alcuin, teacher and perpetual deacon, in: id., *Alcuin: Achievement and Reputation* (Leiden/Köln/Boston 2004) 304–308, Garrison, *Les correspondants* 325f.; ead., *Social world* 79.

<sup>39</sup> Garrison, *Les correspondants* 325. Caroline Walker Bynum has commented: "it is extraordinarily difficult to determine the basic personality characteristics of medieval people." Caroline Walker Bynum, review of Jean Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth-Century France: Psychohistorical Essays* (Oxford 1979), in: *Speculum* 55 (1980) 595–597; Rudolf Schieffer, *Möglichkeiten und Grenzen* 85–95.

<sup>40</sup> See the tabulations in Garrison, *Les correspondants* 323.

<sup>41</sup> Garrison, *Les correspondants* 324.

<sup>42</sup> Garrison, *Les correspondants* 324.

<sup>43</sup> Garrison, *Les correspondants* 326.



what enabled him to broadcast his admonitions so widely (whereas extra-diocesan meddling by bishops and archbishops has always been severely censured).<sup>44</sup>

Comparative study of the distribution of Alcuin's network of letter-recipients combined with analysis of his nicknaming practices also reinforces the impression that Alcuin, whether an egotist or not, had carved out a very special social position for himself and earned the regard of contemporaries far and wide. Alcuin's connections were pan-Insular; in England, he enjoyed special familiarity and intimacy not only with kings and nobles, but also with their wives and daughters and even laymen of lower rank. This pattern would persist in Frankia, and in particular, the familiarity with royal womenfolk deserves mention. Alcuin alone in the court circle can be attested using nicknames for Charlemagne's wives and daughters.<sup>45</sup> His penchant for inventing nicknames reaches back to his English years and again bespeaks authority and familiarity and reciprocal affection. The nicknames that Alcuin invented for others stuck and were apparently regarded as tokens of distinction, as is evident from the way some recipients would later recall the Alcuinian origin of their moniker.<sup>46</sup> For himself, Alcuin used a dazzling variety of aliases (Alcuinus, Albinus, Flaccus Albinus, Entellus and still others). What is particularly striking about his various names and literary personae is the way Alcuin appears to have used particular names and personae exclusively to certain other individuals or cliques in his circle.<sup>47</sup> Both the names that Alcuin invented for others and those he adopted depend on shared reading and external codes of reference. Names and personae function as typological structures of meaning, creating a ramifying network of correspondences between the literary archetype of the recipient's byname and Alcuin's corresponding role – a script for interaction devised by Alcuin. Gian Biagio Conte's term 'code model' is useful to bear in mind when surveying nicknames based on literary borrowings: a code model functions because author and reader recognize the implicit literary rules surrounding it.<sup>48</sup> In the social world constituted by these Alcuinian fictions of familiarity, recognition of the implicit literary rules implies recognition of social obligations.<sup>49</sup>

The variety, complexity and carefully controlled distribution of the by-names and *personae* that Alcuin used for himself reveal his sophisticated intentions: verse and prose distributions may contrast and a clear pattern of distinct self-presentations for English pupils, continental colleagues, and the inner circle of court friendships emerges. For example, in verse, Alcuin used his Horatian moniker Flaccus exclusively to Charlemagne, Angilbert and Delia; in those same contexts Charlemagne was almost always David and Angilbert Homer.<sup>50</sup> The Poetic use of Alcuin's Flaccus name was overwhelming for poems concerned with poetry, the court and the poet's search for patronage – the distribution connotes both intimacy and self-awareness. In letters, the Flaccus-name also has connotations of familiarity. It is also striking to note that all but one of the fifteen letters

<sup>44</sup> Alcuin as perpetual deacon: Bullough, Alcuin 304–308; Alcuin as uniquely influential without a diocese: Garrison, *Les Correspondants* 325–326; Henry Mayr-Harting, Two abbots in politics: Wala of Corbie and Bernard of Clairvaux, in: *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5<sup>th</sup> series 40 (1990) 217–237, at 217 makes the same point about Wala and Bernard.

<sup>45</sup> Garrison, *Les correspondants* 321f., ead., Alcuin and Tibullus, in: *Poesía latina medieval (siglos V–XV) Actas del IV Congreso del "Internationales Mittellateinerkomitee" Santiago de Compostela 12–15 de septiembre de 2002*, ed. Manuel C. Díaz y Díaz/José M. Díaz de Bustamante (Firenze 2005) 749–759, at 751 with full secondary literature.

<sup>46</sup> Mary Garrison, The social world of Alcuin: Nicknames at York and at the Carolingian court, in: *Alcuin of York: Scholar at the Carolingian Court. Proceedings of the Third Germania Latina Conference*, ed. L.A.J.R. Houwen/Alasdair A. MacDonald (*Mediaevalia Groningana* 22, Groningen 1995) 59–79, at 67.

<sup>47</sup> I here summarize my findings from *Fictions of Familiarity*, in: Mary Garrison, *Alcuin's World* 140–250, partially published in ead., *The social world*; amplified in relation to Arn only in ead., *Praesagum nomen tibi* 107–127; the Delia-name in ead., *Alcuin and Tibullus*.

<sup>48</sup> On the term code models, see Gian Biagio Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets Translated from the Italian*, edited with a Forward by Charles Segal (*Cornell Studies in Classical Philology*, Ithaca/London 1986) 31. Conte defines the 'Model as Code' (in contrast to the exemplary model), "this literary institution permits more or less faithful representations, or, in other words, a system of conscious, deliberate rules that the author identifies as indicators of ways in which the text must be interpreted ... this ... notion allows the philologist to reconstruct, from analysis, a corresponding hermeneutic model – a simulacrum of the overall sense which could coherently represent a series of phenomena that could otherwise be registered only piecemeal, in uncoordinated, discrete details." Although Conte's terminology was developed in the first instance to do justice to intricate possibilities of poetic reminiscence, its apposite precision in this instance should be clear.

<sup>49</sup> Alcuin's nicknaming practice has attracted much scholarly notice but little systematic investigation: see Garrison, *The social world* 59, note 2; the extent, intricacy and precision of the system as a whole had not previously been explored, ead., *Alcuin's World* 140–246.

<sup>50</sup> Garrison, *Alcuin's World* 223–225.

in which Alcuin uses Flaccus in the salutation or the main text are addressed to Charlemagne and date from the late 790s on (the sole exception is a letter of 791/2 to Ricbod). In contrast, the prose self-designation Flaccus Albinus (Albinus being Alcuin's long-standing byname)<sup>51</sup> had slightly wider currency with continental friends and court associates.<sup>52</sup>

Significantly, the Flaccus-name, whether or not paired with Albinus appears never to have been used with Alcuin's Anglo-Saxon friends and students, and never occurs in letters sent back to the Insular world. Given its derivation from Horace and the interest in classical poetry cultivated at court, its currency raises intriguing questions about its precise connotations. Although no one has used Angilbert's by-name Homer to argue for knowledge of Homer at court, the possibility that Alcuin adopted his Flaccus-name for reasons that depended on some acquaintance with Horace's character cannot be excluded; its significance will emerge later in this argument. Adjectival occurrences such as *Flaccina rusticitas*,<sup>53</sup> the music of the *Flaccina fistula*<sup>54</sup> and the *Flaccini aures*<sup>55</sup> bear out the impression that the Flaccus role was a performance above all for the benefit of Charlemagne. In short, even taking into account the few exceptions, Alcuin's Flaccus-name is overwhelmingly associated with his years as abbot of Tours, with the milieu of the court, and above all with Charlemagne: a special idiom for interacting with the king which was occasionally extended to other court *familiares*. The full range of Alcuin's self-designations is dazzling and mercurial; there is no space to enumerate the entire gamut here, but two contrasting examples can evoke the diversity: Alcuin could play Desert Father Paul to Adalhard's Anthony, or, implicitly, adulterous classical love-poet Tibullus to Bertha's Delia – among many other possibilities.<sup>56</sup> These roles and nicknames did not just dramatize or constitute a social world: they were often deployed to remind recipients of their implicit duties and even obligations to Alcuin himself.<sup>57</sup>

Egotism or no then, Alcuin's agile deployment of nicknames and literary *personae* bespeaks a highly self-aware social actor with a keen sense of the diverse recipients' situations, expectations, and reading – tailoring the message to the audience (or recipient) – the essence of rhetorical decorum. In brief, then, even if all did not regard Alcuin as 'their Albinus' according to his frequent self-designation in the valedictions of his letters, his social world was neither one-sided nor an artefact of his imagination. His distinctive social position is clearly one factor which enabled Alcuin's activity as an admonisher; his aptitude for literary role play and code-models is another. However, the context for understanding his predilection for telling plain truths in relatively simple language to those of superior status still requires further explanation.<sup>58</sup> Since admonition is a social activity – implying sender, receiver, and shared understanding according to cultural (i.e. rhetorical and moral) norms, – it will be useful to consider some evidence for the reception of admonitions before turning to the shared norms.

#### MATERIAL FORM, RECEPTION, TRANSMISSION

If Alcuin was adept with his large network of contemporaries, he nonetheless does not appear, on the evidence of the text history of his poems and letters, to have been posing for posterity: as we have seen, there are no authorially-arranged compilations furnished with prefaces or divided into books, even if it is clear that some gatherings of letters were recopied in his lifetime. It is only when we come to his admonitions that Alcuin was explicit, and explicit on numerous occasions, about his own intentions for their immediate reception. Alcuin encouraged recipients to carry admonitory letters about with them, or even recopy them – not into collections, but into a form suitable for frequent and easy consultation (implying that the original letter was ephemeral or insufficient in some way?).<sup>59</sup> At least one later reader of Alcuin's letters prized the admonitions: a ninth- or

<sup>51</sup> Alcuin, Epistola 210, ed. Dümmler 350, l. 31: *Albinus habeo nomen inter notos et filios sanctae Dei ecclesiae*.

<sup>52</sup> Garrison, Alcuin's World 226; the only non-continental is Joseph Scottus who had followed Alcuin to the continent.

<sup>53</sup> Alcuin, Epistola 145, ed. Dümmler 231–235.

<sup>54</sup> Alcuin, Epistola 149, ed. Dümmler 241–245.

<sup>55</sup> Alcuin, Epistola 143, ed. Dümmler 224–227.

<sup>56</sup> Garrison, Alcuin and Tibullus; ead., Alcuin's World, 71 and 73f.

<sup>57</sup> Garrison, The social world.

<sup>58</sup> The most striking example of a simple style adopted for letters of admonition occurs in letters to King Æthelred of Northumbria sent after the Viking attack of 793: see Alcuin, Epistolae 16, 18, ed. Dümmler 42–44, 49–52, and Mary Garrison, The Bible and Alcuin's interpretation of current events, in: *Peritia* 16 (2002) 68–84, at 74–80.

<sup>59</sup> Garrison, *Quid Hinieldus* 238; ead., Alcuin's World 34–36; Alcuin, Epistola 119, ed. Dümmler 174, l. 25; id., Epistola 295, ed. Dümmler 454, l. 22; id., Epistola 108, ed. Dümmler 155, l. 36f.; rereading: id., Epistola 270, ed. Dümmler 429, l. 16; id., Epistola

tenth-century Rheims manuscript is furnished with annotations which read “useful admonition”, “admonition useful for many people”, “especially useful for bishops”.<sup>60</sup> Finally, it is crucial to know that Alcuin also entreated his correspondents to address admonitions to him.<sup>61</sup>

### THE DISCOURSE OF ADMONITION

Reception-evidence that Alcuin’s admonitions were valued can qualify the impression that Alcuin was regarded by contemporaries as an irritating and egotistical busy-body and suggest a more complex reception for his admonitions. Still, it is likely that admonition taps into an emotional constellation which is a cross-cultural universal even if its precise configuration can vary: that of individual autonomy in relation to cultural norms, obedience, social hierarchy and the higher moral order.<sup>62</sup> The elements here are directly relevant to the themes of this volume: ego, individuality and self-awareness. So, as with studying evidence for grief, encountering a past individual with a penchant for admonition is likely to entail subjective responses – either understandable negative evaluations such as Fichtenau’s (assuming that the evidence is transparent and projecting our reactions onto the past) or else attempts to make the admonisher more likeable by distancing the admonitions from the admonisher’s character and situating them in a sympathetic cultural context, a tactic which skates close to denial. (Here I will confess that my own attempts to contextualize this aspect of Alcuin’s activity and writing fall into the second category.)

In trying to understand this most important and rebarbative aspect of Alcuin’s activity, it may be useful to enumerate some of the most important justifications and code models associated with Alcuin’s role of admonisher; all would have been familiar to his audience. In the first place is *caritas*, the underlying motive for all of Alcuin’s letters. *Caritas* is repeatedly mentioned by Alcuin as the fundamental hermeneutic principle for all letter writing and interpretation; it is also as a justification for possible presumption. Letters convey a *caritas* which both betokens the affection of the sender and always transcends its written expression; the showing forth of *caritas* is an act of self-revelation and discerning the *caritas* of others through their letters is the basis for knowledge of the other. Alcuin conceived of letter-writing as a gift of *caritas*; and to offer admonition, exhortation and consolation were the duty of charity.<sup>63</sup> Its centrality to Alcuin’s thought about letter-writing, admonition, and human relationships cannot be overestimated.<sup>64</sup> Next there are the biblical models of Paul, Job and Jeremiah. Alcuin could count on his addressees’ recognition of Paul as an archetype or code model: “For the blessed apostle Paul, too, was accustomed to teach his absent sons with kind admonition.” (*Nam et beatus Paulus apostolus absentes filios pia ammonitione saepius erudire solebat.*)<sup>65</sup>

In letters inspired by troubles in his native Northumbria, the transition from Job as Alcuin’s code model and implicit persona to Jeremiah crystallizes a decisive turning point in his world-view after 796. In that year,

109, ed. Dümmler 156, l. 25f.

<sup>60</sup> For discussion, see Garrison, *Alcuin’s World* 34–36; ead., *Quid Hinieldus* 238, 253, note 6. The manuscript is Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana Reg. lat. 272, dated to the tenth century by Dümmler and the ninth by André Wilmart, *Codices Regenses latini*, Tomus 2: *Codices 251–500* (Vatican City 1945) 66–68; I thank the Vatican library for a microfilm. Marginal comments: *epistola multum utilis de multis causis* (fol. 81), *admonitio utilis* (fol. 105 and 35) *optima admonitio* (fol. 119, in capitals); note too that letter 124 (the one with the famous reference to Ingeld and Christ) has the note *epistola utilis ad legenda episcopis de admonitione eorum* (published by Dümmler, *Alcuin Epistolae*, apparatus on 181).

<sup>61</sup> Alcuin, *Epistola* 124, ed. Dümmler 182, l. 17–18; trans. Bullough in Donald Bullough, *What has Ingeld to do with Lindisfarne*, in: *Anglo-Saxon England* 22 (1993) 93–125, at 123.

<sup>62</sup> For an intriguing early Italian humanist comparandum, see Pier Paolo Vergerio’s observations on the ‘salutary principle’ of willingness to accept admonition: Pier Paolo Vergerio’s *The Character and Studies Befitting a Free-Born Youth* § 21, 13 (ed. and trans. Craig Kallendorf, in: *Humanist Educational Treatises. The I Tatti Renaissance Library* 5, Cambridge-Mass. 2002) 13.

<sup>63</sup> Alcuin, *Epistolae* 38, 39, ed. Dümmler 113, 117. Compare the importance of *caritas* as an interpretative principle in Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* I, xxxvi, 40 and xxxix, 43 (ed. Joseph Martin, *Aurelii Augustini opera* 4, 1, CC SL 32, Turnhout 1962) 29 and 31.

<sup>64</sup> Garrison, *Alcuin’s World* 35–38; ead., *The Bible and Alcuin’s interpretation of current events* 71; ead., *Les correspondants* 326–327. For a few of the very many examples, see Alcuin, *Epistola* 38, ed. Dümmler 80, l. 20; id., *Epistola* 39, ed. Dümmler 82, l. 14; id., *Epistola* 49, ed. Dümmler 93, l. 11; id., *Epistola* 111, ed. Dümmler 159, l. 24; id., *Epistola* 83, ed. Dümmler 126, l. 34; id., *Epistola* 57, ed. Dümmler 101, l. 1.

<sup>65</sup> Alcuin, *Epistola* 83, ed. Dümmler 126, l. 36; compare Paul 1 Cor 4, 14: *non ut confundam vos haec scribo sed ut filios meos carissimos*.

Alcuin abandoned a style of admonitory discourse based on hope for change and a conviction in the inscrutability of recent events to favour instead a more fatalistic world-view and theodicy. He had gradually come to believe that the Northumbrians' misfortunes were in fact divine punishment; his despair at the breakdown of civil order in Northumbria and Mercia in 796 was accompanied by a sharpened sense of the imminence of the end of the world.<sup>66</sup> For an early medieval person, there could be no more urgent motivation to admonish than the fear of the end of the world.

The next archetype or code model for Alcuin's admonitions is the figure of the satirist dispensing *satura*. Alcuin had chosen his by-name Flaccus from the Roman poet whose work he may have known first hand.<sup>67</sup> But whether or not those at court had read Horace, they would have known of his reputation. In Isidore's widely-read *Etymologiae*, the *satirici* were defined as those: *a quibus generaliter vitia carpuntur, ut Flaccus, Persius, Iuvenalis vel alii. Hi enim universorum delicta corripunt, nec vitabatur eis pessimum quemque describere, nec cuilibet peccata moresque reprehendere ...*<sup>68</sup> ... *Saturici autem dicti sive quod pleni sint omni facundia, sive a saturitate et copia*. In short, a remarkably apt picture of what Alcuin seemed to undertake in many of his letters and poems – both for content and prolixity – with the proviso that Alcuin's epistolary rebuking was almost always conducted directly to recipients rather than behind their backs. We have seen above how Alcuin used the by-name Flaccus in very limited and specific contexts. Thus it appears that Alcuin had an acute sense of the parameters of his role and acted with the expectation that recipients understood the discourse. So here with the Flaccus name, as with allusions to Saint Paul or to the prophets, Alcuin turned to a source of justifying authority and a literary model that implied a script, a role for both admonisher and addressee.

Alcuin's world-view shifted in 796, a year of misery and the death of kings, and consequent civil disturbances in Northumbria and Mercia.<sup>69</sup> Whether writing to correspondents in England or on the continent, and whether using the mouthpiece of a classical poet, Hebrew prophet, or even St. Jerome, Alcuin's newly sharpened sense of the imminence of the end of the world after 796 underlies the new frequency and intensity of his admonitory discourse. The new apocalypticism can be detected with radio-isotopic precision by the occurrence of certain biblical quotations.<sup>70</sup> Such eschatologically motivated admonition allies Alcuin to both Gregory the Great and St. Paul in their apocalyptic modes.<sup>71</sup> It is illuminating to juxtapose Paul's directions to Timothy with Alcuin's instructions to Beornwine (this very passage was in fact used as an illustration by Fichtenau in his characterization of Alcuin cited above).<sup>72</sup>

2 Tim 4, 2: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season: reprove, entreat, rebuke in all patience and doctrine."

*Praedica verbum insta oportune inopportune*

*argue obsecra increpa in omni patientia et doctrina* 3. *Erit enim tempus cum sanam doctrinam non sustinebunt sed ad sua desideria coacervabunt sibi magistros prurientes auribus* 4. *et a veritate quidem auditum avertent ad fabulas autem convertentur.*

Alcuin: "Advise everyone to obey the will of God; advise the king gently, the bishops with dignity, and the princes with confidence."<sup>73</sup>

*(Ut tibi, carissime frater, tempus vel locus occurrit, semper Dei suade voluntatem omnibus personis: regi suaviter, episcopis honorifice, principibus fducialiter, omnibus veraciter).*<sup>74</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Garrison, *The Bible and Alcuin's interpretation of current events* 71; ead., *Quid Hiniieldus* 240, on apocalypticism.

<sup>67</sup> Garrison, *Alcuin's knowledge of Horace*, in: ead., *Alcuin's World* 251–256, and forthcoming.

<sup>68</sup> Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, 8, 7, 7 and 8, 7, 8 (ed. Wallace M. Lindsay, *Oxford Classical Texts*, 2 vols., Oxford 1911). For a similar view in a more obscure source (but one also known at the court of Charlemagne), see the fourth-century grammarian Diomedes who wrote: *satura dicitur carmen nunc quidem maledicum et ad carpenda hominum vitia compositum quale scripserunt Lucilius et Horatius et Persius*. Diomedes, *Ars Grammatica* (ed. Heinrich Keil, *Grammatici Latini* 1, Leipzig 1857) 297–529, at 485.

<sup>69</sup> Garrison, *The Bible and Alcuin's interpretation of current events*; *Alcuin Epistolae* 116, ed. Dümmler, 171, l. 17.

<sup>70</sup> Wolfram Brandes, 'Tempora periculosa sunt.' Eschatologisches im Vorfeld der Kaiserkrönung Karls des Grossen, in: *Das Frankfurter Konzil von 794: Kristallisationspunkt karolingischer Kultur* 1, ed. Rainer Berndt (Mainz 1997) 49–79, 66–68; Alcuin alludes to the *tempora periculosa* of 2 Tim 3, 1 almost exclusively after 796: the sole occurrence before then is in a letter that cannot be securely dated. For examples and discussion see Garrison, *Quid Hiniieldus* 239–240 and 254–255 where notes 21, 22 and 23 list occurrences and further secondary literature.

<sup>71</sup> Robert A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and His World* (Cambridge 1997) 5, 51f., 63, 92f., 187, 204.

<sup>72</sup> See above p. 8 §.

<sup>73</sup> Translated excerpt from Fichtenau, *The Carolingian Empire* 96.

<sup>74</sup> Alcuin, *Epistola* 82, ed. Dümmler 125, l. 15–17.



The mercurial diversity of Alcuin's various names for himself, roles and personae – satirical, apostolic and so on – might invite an hypothesis of another kind of ego trouble: no stable ego, but instead a fragmented chameleon self? However, there is a single concept which unites the *caritas* of epistolary admonition, the biblical models (apostolic and prophetic) of admonition, and the persona of the Horatian satirist; and it unites them because it underlies them all. That concept is *parrhesia* (*licentia, oratio libera* – closest in modern parlance to the cluster of ideas associated with 'speaking truth to power'). *Parrhesia* is a term of classical rhetoric and was transmitted in a number of classical and late antique treatises known to Alcuin and to at least some of his contemporaries.<sup>75</sup>

Isidore's definition, surely known to Alcuin was: "Parrhesia is the speech full of freedom and *fiducia* ... which must be used with caution." (*Parrhesia est oratio libertatis et fiducia plena ... qua figura caute utendum est.*)<sup>76</sup>

The anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, also known to Alcuin, stated: "It is frankness of speech when, talking before those whom we owe either to reverence or fear, we yet exercise our right to speak out, because we seem justified in reprehending them, or persons dear to them, for some fault." (*Licentia est cum apud eos quos aut vereri aut metuere debemus tamen aliquid pro iure nostro dicimus, quod eos aut quos ii diligunt aliquo in errato vere reprehendere videamur.*)<sup>77</sup>

The terms *parrhesia*, *licentia*, and *oratio libera* occur in a number of rhetorical treatises available in the early Middle Ages so that we can be sure that Alcuin would have known the term; educated contemporaries, too, would have known that frank speech was topic of rhetorical reflection.<sup>78</sup> But in practice, just as early medieval people of the era before the *ars dictaminis* learned to write letters by copying models rather than using a dictaminal manual, so, too, would the practice of *parrhesia* have been understood and acquired more by model than by precept.<sup>79</sup>

In antiquity *parrhesia* had meant the Greek citizen's right to speak in the forum, or the philosopher's courage in telling the truth to the emperor; it came to be associated with a distinctive constellation of related ideas: truth telling, plain speech, the friend versus the flatterer.<sup>80</sup> Alongside rhetorical treatises' definitions, the Bible provided a rich source of examples of *parrhesia* in practice. The Septuagint translators of the Hebrew Bible had occasion to use the Greek word *parrhesia* numerous times and in the Greek New Testament, the word also occurred frequently.<sup>81</sup> Latin translators resorted to a variety of terms to render *parrhesia*, with the result that that the word and concept were fractured into lexical multiplicity. One of these words was *fiducia*, often used to convey the idea that the believer or prophet could speak freely and openly to God, or, that because of his faith in God, he would have the courage to speak boldly to the powerful.<sup>82</sup> The afterlife, in the medieval West, of the theory and practice of frank speech, and of the use of the words *parrhesia* and *fiducia*, calls out for study: that the rhetorical concept and the terms were known is incontrovertible, but delineating the precise and shifting contours of the construction of frank speech awaits investigation.<sup>83</sup>

Nonetheless, even the brief foregoing account of *parrhesia* can shed new light on Alcuin's predilection, in all his diverse aliases, for purveying unsolicited admonition and exhortation to a wide range of addressees.

<sup>75</sup> I first proposed *parrhesia*'s relevance to Alcuin in Garrison, *Les correspondants* 327f.; see also ead., *Quid Hinieldus* 253, note 7.

<sup>76</sup> Isidore, *Etymologiae* 2, 21, 31, ed. Lindsay.

<sup>77</sup> *Rhetorica ad C. Herennium*, *De ratione dicendi* 4, 36 (ed. and trans. Harry Caplan, London 1954); On Alcuin's knowledge of *Ad Herennium*, see Liutpold Wallach, *Alcuin and Charlemagne* (Cornell Studies in Classical Philology 32, Ithaca 1959) 36, 45.

<sup>78</sup> For a concise indication, see the indices of Carl Halm, *Rhetores latini minores* (Leipzig 1863) 20, 20; 46, 17; 68, 130; 520, 28; Cf. Garrison, *Les correspondants* 327, note 28.

<sup>79</sup> Carol Lanham's study of letter writing remains indispensable and exemplary: Carol Lanham, *Freshman composition in the Early Middle Ages: Epistolography and rhetoric before the Ars dictaminis*, in: *Viator* 23 (1992) 116–134. See also Mary Garrison, *Letters to a king and biblical exempla: the examples of Cathulf and Clemens Peregrinus*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 7, 3 (1998) 305–328.

<sup>80</sup> Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, ed. Joseph Pearson (Los Angeles 2001); Arnaldo Momigliano, *Parrhesia*, in: *Dictionary of the History of Ideas. Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas* 2, ed. Philip Wiener (New York 1973) 252–262.

<sup>81</sup> Lodewijk J. Engels, *Fiducia dans la Vulgate. Le problème de la traduction parrhesia-fiducia* (*Graecitas et Latinitas Christianorum primaeva*, supp. 1, Nijmegen 1964); Giuseppe Scarpat, *Parrhesia greca, parrhesia cristiana* (1964, new edition: *Studi biblici* 130, Brescia 2001).

<sup>82</sup> Scarpat, *Parrhesia greca*.

<sup>83</sup> The forthcoming Utrecht PhD dissertation of Irene van Renswoude, *License to speak: The Rhetoric of Free Speech from Ambrose to Rather* will address this lacuna.

And recognizing Alcuin as a parrhesiast rather than a peevish egotist brings into relief the striking similarities between him, Boniface, Columbanus and other Insular *peregrini*, who were no less outspoken in their letters.<sup>84</sup> For the student of themes related to early medieval individuality, self-expression, identity, or even egotism, it is intriguing to consider that alongside these famous and well-documented Insular parrhesiasts, other more obscure Insular peregrini also emerge into view as named (if not necessarily knowable) individuals in scribal colophons: an exacting survey of the colophons in all volumes of the *Codices Latini Antiquiores* showed that Insular scribes on the continent signed their names or entered requests for prayers far more often than their continental counterparts.<sup>85</sup> The simple common denominator of both of these examples of selves emerging out of anonymity and into view as nameable, or knowable persons is the foreign diasporic status of the English and the Irish on the continent.

The quotations that follow reveal that Alcuin's discourse of admonition depended on a distinct set of recurring words – a personal lexicon of *parrhesia* in which terms such as *caritas*, *veritas*, *fiducia* and *praesumptio*<sup>86</sup> (or their derivatives) occur in clusters. (Although the words themselves are rooted in the long history of *parrhesia*, preliminary comparisons with other parrhesiastic Insular writers indicate that each had recognizable individual preferences for justifying outspokenness.)

In the quotations, significant words are in bold-face type. Excerpts of two of the following have been cited above; with the fuller context supplied below, Alcuin's lexicon of *parrhesia* becomes evident:

Alcuin to Charlemagne (800/801):

*Deum invoco testem cordis mei me haec **plena fide** et perfecto prosperitatis vestrae in omnibus desiderio scripsisse; obsecrans supplicii devotione haec eadem patienter vestram legere beatitudinem, nec aliquid iracundiae in meam habere praesumptionem, talia vestrae ingerentis sapientiae. Licet **caritas** mea stulta videri valeat, tamen numquam infidelis nec in minimo nec in maximo inveniri poterit. **Fiducia** enim probatissimae humilitatis vestrae haec scribere **praesumpsit**.*

*Forte quislibet dicit: "Quid ille homo alienis se ingerit rebus?" Non agnoscit nihil mihi alienum vestrae prosperitatis esse debere; quam super salutem corporis mei vel vitae meae longaevitatem diligere me testor. Tu prosperitas regni, tu salus populi, tu decus ecclesiae, tu omnium protectio fidelium Christi. ... Ideo sollicita mente et pia intentione pro tua prosperitate et salute curam habere et intercedere iustum et necessarium habemus, domine desiderantissime atque omni honore dignissime, David rex.*<sup>87</sup>

"I call upon God as the witness of my heart that I have written these things in **full faith** and with a complete desire for your prosperity in all things; begging with supplicant devotion that your blessedness read these same patiently, nor have any anger towards my presumption of being the one bringing such things to your wisdom. Although my **charity** may seem to be folly, still, it will never be found unfaithful in either the smallest or the largest matter. For it is my **faith** in your excellent humility which **dares** to write these things.

Perhaps someone is saying: Who is that man who deals in another man's business?" He does not realize that nothing about your well-being out to be foreign to me; I swear that I prize it above the health of my body or the length of my life. You are the well-being of the kingdom, the health of the people, the glory of the church, you are the protector of all Christ's faithful ... On that account with watchful mind and pious intent we hold it just and needful to take care to intercede for your well-being and salvation, O King David, most beloved lord and most worthy of every honour."

Alcuin to Beorwine (793x6):

*Multis miseriis turbatum est hoc saeculum, et non est refrigerium in eo, nisi in misericordia Dei et fide amicorum. Nudi venimus et nudi recedimus, nisi qui bonis animam vestiet operibus (cf. Iob 1, 21; cf 1 Tim 6, 7; Eccl 5, 14).*

*Ut tibi, carissime frater, tempus vel locus occurrit, semper Dei suade voluntatem omnibus personis: regi suaviter, episcopis honorifice, principibus **fiducialiter**, omnibus **veraciter**. Nostrum est seminare, Dei fructificare.*<sup>88</sup>

"This world is troubled by many miseries and there is no consolation in it except in the mercy of God and the faith of friends. Naked we came and naked we return except the one who will clothe his soul with good works. Dearest brother,

<sup>84</sup> An article on the Insular latin parrhesiasts is in preparation.

<sup>85</sup> James J. John, 'The named (and namable) scribes.'

<sup>86</sup> Pierre Miquel, 'Praesumere-praesumptio' dans l'ancienne littérature monastique, in: *Revue bénédictine* 79 (1969) 424–436; note that *praesumptio* is not a technical rhetorical term.

<sup>87</sup> Alcuin, *Epistola* 211, ed. Dümmler 351–352, 352, l. 24–31; cf. Terence, *Heauton Timorumenos* I, i 75–79.

<sup>88</sup> Alcuin, *Epistola* 82, ed. Dümmler 124–125, l. 13–18.

as the time and place occur for you, always recommend the will of God to all people – to the king, gently; to bishops, respectfully; to princes, **courageously and faithfully**, and to all, **truthfully**. Ours is to sow, God's to bring the fruit."

Alcuin to Count Magenharius (793x5):

*Obsecro, ne me **praesumptiosum** arbitreris haec tibi scribentem. **Caritas** Christi et vestrae salutis amor, et vestrae bonitatis fiducia, haec me monuit scribere; optans vos et praesentem habere prosperitatem et futuram promereri beatitudinem.*<sup>89</sup>

"I beg that you not deem me **presumptuous** in writing these things to you. The **charity** of Christ and (my) love for your salvation (or health) and **trust** in your goodness – these things bade me write, wishing for you to have prosperity and to deserve future blessedness."

Alcuin to Æthelbald, abbot of Wearmouth-Jarrow (789x96):

*Obsecro ne me **praesumptiosum** estimates et vanum, dum te haec omnia melius scientem ammonero. **Caritas** me conpulit loqui, quae omnia suffert; per quam ut meam imperitiam sufferas deprecor et ut diligentem te diligas, quia qui in **caritate** manet, in Deo manet; quia Deus **caritas** est.*<sup>90</sup> [1 Cor 13, 7] [1 Ioh.4, 16]

"I beg that you not think me presumptuous and vain while I am advising you – you who know all these things better. **Charity**, which beareth all things, bade me speak, by it – if you can bear my imperitia, – I beseech that you may love one who loves you, since he who abideth in charity abideth in God, since God is **charity**."

Alcuin to Archbishop Æthelheard of Canterbury (793):

*Esto ... praedicator et non adulator. Melius est **Deum timere** quam hominem, plus Deo placere quam homini **blandiri**. Quid est **adulator** nisi **blandus inimicus**. Ambos perdit: et se ipsum et suum auditorem ...  
... Ille pro tuo amore clavis confixus pependit in cruce; et tu, sedens in sella dignitatis tuae, ob **timorem hominis** tacueris. non ita, frater, non ita ...*<sup>91</sup>

"Be ... a preacher and not a flatterer. It is better to fear God than man and still better to please God than to flatter a man. What is a flatterer but an alluring enemy? He destroys both – [the flatterer himself] and his hearer."

Alcuin characterized Ælberht of York, his teacher and later the archbishop in terms which reveal a keen awareness of the alliance between the practice of *parrhesia* and its biblical foundation:

*Non regi aut ducibus iustus parcebat iniquis  
Sed neque decrevit, curarum sub pondere propter,  
Scripturas fervens industria prisca legendi.*<sup>92</sup>

"In his justice that bishop did not spare evil kings or nobles,  
And his former eagerness and zeal for reading Scripture  
grew no less under the burden of responsibility."

The examples illustrate a characteristically Alcuinian lexicon of *parrhesia* – or perhaps an idiolect – repetitive and formulaic, but also amenable to situational fine-tuning. As the bold-face words in the foregoing examples show, *caritas*, presumption and *fiducia* are central, but fearlessness and truth-telling are also recurrent elements. All are associated with a literary heritage that was ancient, venerable and familiar. The one who chose the role of the parrhesiast took on a role that required a well-honed sensitivity to literary and social norms. Alcuin's predilection for epistolary admonition then, far from signifying the peevish outbursts of an egotist trying to set the world to rights, reflects the social and epistolary negotiation of a master of rhetoric stepping in again and again to take up a role whose scripts he knew and performed with finesse, confident that his correspondents were no less sophisticated and that they shared his urgent concern with salvation as the end of the sixth age approached.

<sup>89</sup> Alcuin, Epistola 33, ed. Dümmler 75, l. 14. Here the *fiducia* is Alcuin's trust in his addressee's good will, just as in epistola 211 Alcuin refers to his own full faith (*plena fides*) in Charlemagne's: Alcuin, Epistola 211, ed. Dümmler 352, l. 18.

<sup>90</sup> Alcuin, Epistola 67, ed. Dümmler 111, l. 33.

<sup>91</sup> Alcuin, Epistola 17, ed. Dümmler 45, l. 23–28 and 33–35.

<sup>92</sup> Alcuin, The Bishops, l. 1479–1480, 116; translation on 117: On these lines, see Bullough, Alcuin 276.

